

Eventing Risk Management Q&A

What is risk management in Eventing?

The FEI Eventing Risk Management and Action Plan, which was incorporated in the FEI Eventing Rules in 2010, was created in response to the Hartington Report of 2000. It combines two streams of activity: active and passive measures that should be used to minimise the risk in what is and will remain a risk sport.

The primary objective of the FEI Eventing Risk Management Action Plan, and one of the key recommendations in both the Hartington and subsequently the Barnett Report of 2015, is to reduce horse falls, and particularly rotational falls.

It is important to note that FEI risk management in Eventing does not just concentrate on the fence and the use of frangible technology. As stated in the Barnett Report, fence related factors account for only 10% of the variability in horse falls. The FEI approach is based on analysis of all risk factors.

What has the FEI done on risk management to date?

The FEI has adopted a holistic approach to risk management, starting with a detailed overview of what was happening in our sport from 2004 onwards so that we could understand the trends, and the effect of the different actions could be monitored.

The FEI Eventing Risk Management and Action Plan includes active and passive measures used to minimise the risk.

Active measures are the preventative elements which are aimed at preventing accidents or incidents on the cross country. These include, but are not limited to, data collection and analysis; better training for both horse and rider; the National Safety Officer programme; Officials education; horse and rider qualifications; disciplinary procedures such as warning cards for dangerous riding; and course design.

Passive measures are the protective secondary actions which are aimed at limiting the consequences of an incident such as a mistake of horse or rider. These include, but are not limited to, rider protection (helmet, body protectors, air vests); medical and veterinary coverage; frangible technology.

The FEI is also now working with the equestrian data science company EquiRatings, and we will use the EquiRatings Quality Index (ERQI) to develop competition qualification indices based on past results to predict risk indicators. The ERQI will provide the tools to minimise the risk of horse falls by highlighting horses at greater risk.

So have the numbers of rotational falls been reduced?

In the 10-year period between 2006 and 2016 the percentage of rotational falls on starters was reduced by more than 50%. The reduction in horse falls, particularly rotational falls where the horse somersaults over the fence, potentially causing serious injury to both horse and rider, is an ongoing goal, but by halving the percentage of rotational falls in this 10-year period, we believe we are on the right track and we will continue to take the necessary measures to continue this positive trend.

What is frangible technology?

Frangible technology is one of the multiple elements of the FEI Eventing Risk Management Action Plan. It is a protective secondary action to limit the consequences of a mistake by horse or rider at a cross country fence. The current frangible technology is specifically aimed at reducing the likelihood of a rotational horse fall, which has been identified as the type of fall most likely to result in serious injury to horse or rider.

After four years of testing, together with the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) in Great Britain, the FEI produced the standard to define minimum strength requirements of frangible technology in 2013. The creation of the standard represented a necessary step in order to integrate frangible fence construction technology alongside the traditional cross country fence construction while maintaining the fundamental principles of the cross country test.

The technology must not expose rider or horse to a higher risk of injury than an equivalent current fixed cross-country fence, in particular when activated; must have a minimum strength to ensure that it is representative of a fixed fence; and must have a repeatable activation performance throughout the competition in order to be fair to all competitors.

Can it stop a rotational fall?

The current technology is designed to reduce the chances of a rotational fall when a horse hits a fence.

Why is the FEI not making its use mandatory?

The global use of frangible technology is one of our goals in risk management, and it is the FEI's role to provide the necessary educational and logistical support to National Federations to enable them to source approved devices, ensure their correct use and ultimately decide when the time is right to make their use compulsory so that frangible technology is used effectively worldwide. We are also encouraging the National Federations, alongside the FEI, to look at other aspects of risk management, including coaching and course design. Frangible technology is clearly part of the way forward, but it is one element in a complex picture.

While rotational horse falls have decreased dramatically, there is evidence – as highlighted in the Barnett report – that the number of horse falls in general is higher at fences fitted with frangible technology. Although clearly it could be the question rather than the frangible technology that is causing these falls, more information and data is needed to understand this horse fall rate.

It is a priority to reduce horse falls as a whole so this is where data collection is an extremely important part of the decision-making process around the world. However, as stated above, FEI statistics show that rotational falls have been reduced by more than 50% in the 10-year period from 2006-2016 so there are clear benefits. The bottom line is that we need to have a better understanding of this evidence, and where it fits into the overall picture, before we can consider making the use of frangible technology mandatory.

Isn't that going against the recommendations of the Risk Management Steering Group?

Following the recommendations of the Risk Management Steering Group, we are continuing to work with our National Federations on the logistical and educational elements of frangibles, respecting the individual decision of each National Federation regarding their eventual mandatory use in their own country when they have the knowledge base to ensure the technology can be effectively used. The decision of National Federations to use frangible technology is fully supported by the FEI and in line with National Federations taking their responsibilities on risk management. However, following a more comprehensive evaluation by the FEI Eventing Committee and for the reasons mentioned above, the FEI strongly believes that it would not be beneficial to the sport to impose mandatory implementation at this point in time.

So should the FEI stop recommending the use of frangible technology?

No, for the same reasons as above, but the facts are that although we have evidence that there is an increased risk of horse falls at fences fitted with frangible technology, rotational falls have been dramatically decreased and the percentage of serious injuries have also shown a strong reduction, halved from 0.28% of starters in 2006 to 0.13% in 2016. The

percentage of horse falls overall is also reducing, going down from 1.76% of starters in 2006 to 1.4% in 2016, so the risk management strategy is clearly having a positive effect.

More information on the FEI Eventing Risk Management and Action Plan is available [here](#).

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